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WOMAN AND THE COMMONWEALTH: OR A QUESTION OF EXPEDIENCY

BY

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OF THE SUFFOLK BAR

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PREFACE.

EXCEPT, perhaps, in the matter of arrangement, no originality is claimed for this Essay. Whatever I could find in print on the subject of Woman Suffrage I read diligently, and did not hesitate to reproduce in my own language any argument that seemed cogent. A thorough discussion of a question, worn so threadbare, would have been possible on no other terms.

To my friend, Mr. Josiah Quincy, of Quincy, who reported the municipal woman suffrage bill in the last General Court, I desire to express especial thanks for much kind criticism and assistance.

GEORGE PELLEW.

WOMAN AND THE COMMONWEALTH.

SEVERAL bills were last year reported to the House of Representatives of Massachusetts by the Committee on Woman Suffrage, granting to female citizens, absolutely or on some condition of local option, the right to vote in city and town elections and in town meetings, and to hold city and town offices. The principal bill failed to pass, but received a larger vote than had ever before been cast in the House for a similar measure. The same bill, or one substantially to the same effect, will probably be submitted to the present legislature, and since it appeared, in the debates at the time, that the rational principles which should determine the disposition of the measure were not generally understood, the present occasion seems to be a fitting one for a brief and simple statement of those principles, and for a somewhat comprehensive discussion of the most plausible objections which have on various occasions been raised against it.

The propriety of woman suffrage in some form or other is no longer a question of purely speculative interest. In England for nearly twenty years municipal suffrage has been enjoyed by unmarried women who are property holders. In Utah Territory, since its organization, women have, till recently, been entitled to vote, and are now deprived of that power by act of Congress for reasons only of local, and not of general, application. In Wyoming Territory and in Washington Territory woman suffrage has been an assured success, and only the constitutionality and not the wisdom of the law granting it has ever been questioned. In Kansas, with its population of nearly one million, women have been granted municipal suffrage upon the same terms as men, and at the elections held last spring voted in large numbers. In New York and Maine similar bills have within a year passed the

Senate, though they have been subsequently rejected by the House. In Rhode Island a constitutional amendment establishing woman suffrage in that State last year passed the legislature and was submitted to the people, but not adopted. In our own legislature a bill granting municipal suffrage to women has for several years been favorably reported from the committee, and has secured a large vote in favor of its passage. Woman suffrage, whatever it may have been in the past, is to-day a question of practical politics. The time has gone by for that ridicule which invariably marks the first stage in the history of every proposition for the improvement of society or government, and the time has come for its serious and thoughtful consideration.

The result of any extension of the suffrage cannot be determined with precision before the extension is actually made. Each successive reform bill in England was denounced by its opponents as being "a leap in the dark," and as likely or certain to lead to commercial and political ruin, and those fears were in each case dispelled only by the fact of practical success. In the case of a municipal suffrage bill the danger from possible failure is reduced to a minimum. An extension of the right of suffrage generally has the disadvantage of being practically irrevocable, since human beings are seldom willing to consent to any abridgment of privileges they have once obtained: but a municipal suffrage bill proposes what is, properly speaking and strictly, an experiment. By it, female citizens, qualified as are other legal voters, are given the right merely to vote for city and town officers and on city and town questions, and, since they are not to be entitled to vote for members of the legislature, the passage of such a bill will in no manner affect the power of a succeeding legislature to repeal it. The members of the General Court will continue to represent only their present constituencies, and, if the operation of even such limited woman suffrage is found to be inconvenient or injurious, it will at least have served to create no improper motives, personal or partisan, in favor of its perpetuation.

In public, as in private matters, wisdom is gained only by experience, and experience by experiment. When a question of fact must be answered and the facts are in doubt, an ex-

periment becomes a necessity, and, whatever the issue, must result in the benefit and enlightenment of the public. If, then, the system of government in the United States and the condition of society in Massachusetts are not such as to prove, beyond a reasonable doubt, that it cannot be for the general welfare for any woman, however qualified, however wise, however much interested, to vote upon any political question, however pertinent, or for any public officer, however unimportant, — it is clear that the public good requires that the propriety of woman suffrage, its suitable limits and extent, should be submitted to some practical test. Such a test is provided by a municipal suffrage bill, and no test could possibly be provided in a manner more simple, more safe, or more conservative.

That the provisions of such a municipal suffrage bill are consistent with the system of government in the United States, and are also adapted to the condition of society in Massachusetts, appears on a brief survey of the elementary principles of representative government and on a consideration of the various objections to it that have been suggested.

It is, indeed, generally true that a considerable change in the existing form of government or order of society should not be made except for reasons so cogent as to amount almost to absolute necessity. As a rule, the long continuance of a custom is some evidence of its usefulness, or at least of its convenience. The presumption against change or in favor of an ancient custom arises, however, only when the change is a departure from recognized and well-tested principles, or when the custom originated from intelligent choice by the people affected by it, and in conditions that have remained unchanged. No such presumption exists against a change which tends to abolish an anomalous exception to principles of universal application; no such presumption exists in favor of a custom which originated simply as the natural result of modes of thought long since discredited and in conditions that have finally passed away. To this last class belongs the change proposed by the advocates of woman suffrage and the custom they desire to abolish. It is conceivable that the disfranchisement of women may be an anachronism; and no presumption in favor of an anachronism is raised by its antiquity.

In every nation of the civilized world there has been a slow, but continuous evolution in the form of government, from a military type to an industrial type, from government by involuntary coöperation to government by voluntary co-operation, from government by force to government by discussion. In the early social systems the only laws were rigid, unchangeable customs, and there was no suffrage, no free choice of chiefs or officers, but only submission to hereditary masters by those who were unwilling or unable to resist. Through various modifications, under special influences, the feudal system, essentially a military form of government, was developed in Europe as small societies became merged by conquest into larger groups; councils existed, but the local bodies were autocratic or expounders merely of the customary laws, and the general bodies were advisory and not legislative. In England the first parliament that could be called in any sense representative was summoned only to facilitate the laying of taxes that were not sanctioned by custom. From that time to the present, in English-speaking communities, class after class of citizens has been enfranchised, from mingled motives of partisan and public expediency, until finally complete manhood suffrage has been established in twenty-five of the United States.

The development of popular government has coincided with the development of commerce, or rather the political changes have been related to the commercial and social changes as effect to cause. As a nation grows into an industrial community, the interdependence of all its classes and of all its members becomes gradually manifest. A nation, again, in perpetual danger of war, cannot survive in the struggle for existence without perfect obedience to a single and despotic executive. An industrial community, on the other hand, can compete with its rivals most successfully only when all its citizens are exercising all their powers and faculties to the best advantage under laws that adjust as simply and easily as possible the relations of all the citizens to one another. In the first case a policy of restriction is necessary, since all qualities detrimental in warfare must be suppressed; in the second case, the law of equal freedom is essential, since all human qualities, if wisely directed, may make for produc-

tion and social order and happiness. The history of legislation in England for the last hundred years, accordingly, exhibits mainly successive repeals of restrictive laws and customs, surviving from more barbarous ages, and the enactment of regulations defining and adjusting the relations between groups and classes of persons according to their several interests and necessities. Each person knows his own needs and interests better than any other; the public good, therefore, requires that such knowledge shall be obtained and utilized: and experience has proved that the suffrage is the only satisfactory device ever suggested for this purpose. When landlords legislate for tenants, or planters for slaves, nothing but evil to the individuals legislated for, and consequently to the state, is found to result. Historical experience, then, and not any philosophical theory of abstract right, has proved the truth of the principles, that in an industrial, civilized community, government should be representative, and that no individual or class can be adequately represented by another.

The right to the suffrage, then, is not in any case, or in any strict sense, an "inalienable right," or a "natural right,"— but in every individual case, whether of a man, a woman, or a child, depends upon the stage of evolution of the particular community at that time. By the shores of the Albert Nyanza, a negro as such has no right, ethical or political, to vote, but he had by the banks of the Tennessee, even before the fourteenth amendment. An African tribe might be ruined by adopting theories that are necessary to the existence of an American State. The question of political privileges can never be one of abstract logic and theoretic justice, the only logic involved is the logic of facts, and the only justice, the justice of expediency. Among an intelligent people, moreover, and under a government by discussion, political qualifications and disqualifications must be founded on reason and common sense, since the lessons of history are not learned by instinct and there has not yet been developed in man an immediate intuition of expediency.

The reasons that have proved the public advantage of representative government in a civilized society would seem to require the exercise of the suffrage by all the persons constituting the state, except in case of the existence of some

special personal disqualification. Conviction of a crime, infancy, insanity, non-payment of taxes, pauperism, may each fairly be held to be such a disqualification, on the ground that criminals cannot be expected to vote honestly, nor children or insane persons to vote intelligently, nor paupers to vote impartially. But womanhood, in itself, is not obviously such a disqualification.

The question is not, whether there are differences between the sexes, but simply whether the sexual characteristics of women are a disqualification for voting. The social distinctions between men and women that once existed have now almost all been obliterated. The same education, the same occupations are open to both. They have the same rights of property and the same power to contract. They have equal responsibility before the law. Indeed, the only obvious social differences between men and women that still survive are differences of dress and of political privileges.

Again, women who are stockholders in a corporation are now entitled to vote at elections of corporate officers, and no just distinction can be made between municipal and private corporations that would make womanhood a disqualification in case of the former and not of the latter. The suffrage, moreover, was extended to men, not specially summoned by the sovereign, because it was felt desirable that those should vote subsidies who were to pay them ; women then were not property holders and tax-payers, but now are both. Women were then as dependent as slaves upon their husbands or fathers, and as ignorant as children ; now they are neither peculiarly ignorant nor legally dependent. When women were legally and socially in the condition of slaves or children, it would have been absurd to permit them to vote ; now that they are emancipated from the condition that was the reason for their disqualification, it is unreasonable that the disqualification should continue. This is not the only instance in which a sentiment inherent in obsolete conditions survives in this brighter sunshine like a ghost, and is as hard to exorcise and as fondly cherished. We may say, then, that the logic of facts clearly justifies the argument for woman suffrage.

Public expediency also justifies the argument for the same

reasons that it justifies our American freedom of suffrage. Our government needs the political representation of male citizens for reasons independent of virility, paternity, and physical strength. It is not manhood, as such, that qualifies a man for the suffrage, it is intelligence, honesty, and interest that qualify for the suffrage: therefore it is not womanhood, or lack of manhood, that should disqualify a woman for the suffrage, but only lack of intelligence, honesty, or interest.

A government perfectly representing the whole people is the American ideal government, is the government best adapted to an industrial community; but a government is not actually representative so long as one half of the people are, for arbitrary reasons, unrepresented.[1] If women are in essential human qualities like men, then the state has the same need of the votes of its women as of its men, in other words women have the same right to vote that men have; if women are essentially unlike men, then they are not and cannot be represented by men, but can only be misrepresented by men, and the extent of the difference between men and women in such essential human qualities is the measure of the injustice and impolicy of legislation by men alone affecting the whole people. It is true that in the latter case the evil may be without remedy, that we must be contented with a system of government, inherently and eternally imperfect, but not unless the fact of womanhood is an insurmountable disqualification for voting.

It cannot be assumed off-hand that sex involves more than a certain physical distinction, and in respect to the breeding and nurture of children a certain division of function and labor between men and women. Under a government by discussion, in an industrial community, it cannot be taken for granted and without proof, that any physical peculiarity has any connection whatever with ability to take part in the discussion and decision of political questions or in the choice of public officers, or that either a man's obligation to support his

[1] In *Common Sense as to Woman Franchise*, Mr. Dexter observes that in the country at large less than twenty-two per cent. of the women can be said to be deprived of representation; but with respect to this State, where the number of competent women probably exceeds the number of legal voters, the words of the text seem sufficiently accurate.

family or a woman's obligation to rear and tend her children is an occupation so engrossing as to engage the whole physical and intellectual energies of a human being, to the necessary exclusion of all interests not purely money-making or domestic.

In a civilized country, like Massachusetts, the government should be simply a special committee of the whole people, with powers, delegated to them by the whole people, to regulate the internal and social relations of the whole people for the general good, — such at least is the consensus of opinion among the wisest modern thinkers and statesmen, and such is the teaching of universal history. The beneficial exercise of such powers would seem to require the intelligent interest, advice, and coöperation of the whole people, unless special and exceptional conditions in any particular case make such interest frivolous, such advice absurd, or such coöperation impossible. "The *a priori* presumption is in favor of freedom and impartiality. It is held that there should be no restraint not required by the general good, and that the law should be no respecter of persons, but should be alike, save where dissimilarity of treatment is required by positive reasons, either of justice or of policy." It is not enough for a nation that all its sons should be brave and all its daughters virtuous, but rather that every instinct and faculty of each citizen should be developed, trained, and utilized for the good of all. Such a development is impossible without free exercise, and such exercise is impossible without freedom of choice, and freedom of expression, and the only efficient mode of expression in matters political, is the ballot. In the words of Garfield, in his Inaugural Address, "Freedom can never yield its fullness of blessings so long as the law or its administration places the smallest obstacle in the pathway of any virtuous citizen." In an American Commonwealth it is not necessary on every occasion to prove the advantage to the state of individual liberty, but it must always be necessary that the maintainers or defenders of any custom or institution, restrictive of such liberty, shall succeed in retaining it only on condition of proving year after year to every questioner that the time has not yet come for its abolition. In respect, then, to any woman suffrage bill, the burden of proof is upon those who oppose its enactment, since their contention is in restriction of liberty,

is for the retention of an obstacle, and no small one, in the pathway of many millions of virtuous citizens.

The question is, then, reduced to this: What and of what weight are the reasons alleged for maintaining a restrictive custom, surviving from the obsolete habits and barbarous conditions of primitive society, a custom that forms a single exception to principles of government tried and approved by the experience of universal history?

This custom is the disqualification of a woman as a voter simply because she is a woman: and the remaining argument for its abolition (for the mere statement of the custom is the strongest argument against it) must of necessity consist in answering the objections that actually have been, or that conceivably or logically might be, urged in its favor.

The objections to abolishing such an anomalous custom must be based on either experience or theory, in other words, on fact or fancy.

All possible objections assumed to be based upon fact must fall under one of three general heads. Since the qualities of any human being may be roughly divided into physical, mental, and moral qualities, any argument that the qualities of a woman as such disqualify her for voting must be concerned with the physical, the mental, or the moral qualities of women. A discussion of the various objections, professing to be based on fact, in such an order, is likely to be both exhaustive and convenient.

Do a woman's physical qualities disqualify her for voting?

It is said that women ought not to vote because they are unable to fight, to enforce laws, or to endure the fatigue and burden of voting and of learning how to vote.

The first argument is answered by the fact that the tie between voting and fighting ceased so soon as nations became civilized and hired or raised armies to do their fighting for them: since that time, indeed, it may be said that the only connection between bullets and ballots has been the alliteration. As a general rule, in civilized countries, the soldiers in the field are, practically, disqualified for voting, and the local government of their country is, in time of war, of necessity intrusted to those who are left at home as disabled or as not

needed for active service. In time of peace, on the other hand, the soldier has, as a rule, no political privileges superior to those of any other citizen, however much crippled or decrepit.

The argument is readily reduced to an absurdity, for it would, if logically carried out, disfranchise the great mass of the most intellectual and the best educated men in the community, since, according to the statistics of the medical department during the civil war, over ninety-five per cent. of clergymen, nearly seventy-five per cent. of journalists, sixty-seven per cent. of physicians, and fifty-four per cent. of lawyers were found to be unfit for military service.

A suggestion, often made, that if all the women were to vote one way, and all the men another, the women, if they should pass a law, would be unable to enforce it, and so would bring the law itself into contempt, is an ingenious effort of imagination, but of no weight as a practical argument. When it is remembered how great are the divergencies of opinion among men, and that unanimity is no less rare among women; how seldom a question involves only one consideration; and how inextricably intermingled, although not identical always, are the interest of men and women, it becomes obvious that the contingency so alarming to many persons could never occur. In case, however, such an improbable, if not impossible thing, should happen, the government and the law would yet survive. The American people is a law-abiding people. When a law has once been enacted, or an officer lawfully elected, those who opposed the bill enforce the law, those who reviled the candidate obey the officer. Unless a majority of the voters of to-day are at heart lawbreakers, a law will never be disregarded simply because it was passed to be enacted by the votes of persons inferior in physical strength to their opponents.

The third argument is no less fallacious. Women, it is said, suffer from ill-health more frequently than men, they are also more nervous, and more subject to general debility. Married women are often for long periods disabled, and not infrequently break down, in consequence of the natural consequences of maternity and special household cares that in any condition of society are inevitable. Such being the case, says Mr. Francis Parkman, woman suffrage would be a cruelty.

It is, perhaps, unnecessary to suggest that the argument would logically lead to establishing a health qualification for voters generally, and that such a qualification would be ridiculous. Necessity and self-preservation are laws sufficiently imperative to control conduct without being countersigned by the governor and council. A woman too sick to vote will not vote for the same reason that a man too sick to vote does not vote. Some women may go to church when they ought to stay at home, and may injure themselves or neglect their children by so doing, but it is not desirable, therefore, that the law should allow men only to go to church. From the point of view of health, no rational distinction can be made between going to church to pray and going to the ballot box to vote, except that the churches are open every Sunday and the polls but once a year, and that a woman can go to church two or three times on one day, but is forbidden by law to vote more than once.

The objection is not only absurd, but has the additional misfortune of being probably the reverse of the truth. The exercise of the suffrage would presumably tend to improve, rather than to impair, the health of the average woman. There is nothing dangerous to health in reading political articles in the daily papers, in discussing political questions with relations or friends, or in walking the distance of a few hundred yards and depositing a piece of paper in a box. Many women now do all these things without any suffering in consequence. On the contrary, the reasonable exercise of any faculty, and of all the faculties, of mind and body, is positively beneficial to man or woman. "Nervous energy run to waste" is the secret of so much of the lassitude and sickness prevalent among American women. "For my own part," says Sir Spencer Wells, one of the greatest living physicians, "I think women capable of a great deal more than they have been accustomed to in times past. If overwork sometimes leads to disease, it is morally more wholesome to work into it than to lounge into it, and if some medical practitioners have observed cases where mental overstrain has led to disease, I cannot deny that I also have *at long intervals* seen some such cases. But for every such example I feel sure that I have seen at least twenty where evils equally

to be deplored are caused in young women by want of mental occupation, by deficient exercise, too luxurious living, and too much amusement." This is true of the unmarried and the young, but it is no less true of the married and the middle-aged. Nervous diseases of every kind are most often caused by confinement to a narrow circle of thoughts and duties. A brisk conversation about politics is stimulating and healthy in itself, but is especially valuable in distracting the attention from the petty, harassing details of daily life. There is no more certain cure for nervousness and its baleful attendants, hypochondria and dyspepsia, than the excitement of interests broader and more impersonal than the interests of the kitchen and the nursery, than the brooding over one's own or one's husband's emotions, ill temper, or wrong-doing. To enable women to be efficiently interested in as many things as possible, is to give them a tonic better than any medicine; to compel them to be interested in a few things only, is to poison the whole atmosphere of their intellectual life.

Finally it must be observed that weakness, at least physical weakness, so far from being a disqualification for voting, in a civilized community is the greatest possible qualification for voting, since representative governments have become established mainly for the protection of the weak.

Do a woman's mental qualities disqualify her for voting?

That women's minds differ from men's minds is a theory it would be difficult to establish. It used to be said that the smaller average size of women's brains proved their intellectual inferiority to men, but it is now well ascertained that the size of the brain does not vary in direct proportion to the intelligence, which depends rather on the quality of the texture or the complexity of the convolutions of the brain than on its bulk. Babies, moreover, of both sexes are to be supposed to inherit not unequally the mental characteristics of both their parents. Intelligence, no more than physique, descends by entail male or female, from father to son and from mother to daughter only. It is a well-known fact that the intellectual qualities of great men are often, if not usually, inherited from their mothers. Throughout childhood there is no marked dis-

tinction in capacity between boys and girls. Wherever young men and women, here or in England, at school or college, have the same education, they compete on equal terms and win similar prizes. Whenever women have had the same opportunity and inducement as men for study and investigation, in astronomy, medicine, political economy, history, journalism, fiction, ethics, they have shown no special inferiority to men. Queens and princesses, when called to govern, have been no less successful than the kings and princes of their family. Even in this Commonwealth women on the school boards, in public societies, or in government offices, as students of the condition of the poor, conductors of philanthropic enterprises, or managers of a business or a fortune, after suitable training for such work, have not generally been found deficient in enterprise or sagacity.

It is not usually from the lips of the wisest men that sneers at women's intelligence are apt to fall, but from the lips of boys unacquainted with the world, or of men whose lack of wisdom has been a fruitful source of amusement or profit to women or wiser men. It is true that women are generally supposed to be impatient of argument, to make a personal application of impersonal principles, and to judge by a narrow standard of preference, prejudice, or morality; but women, like men, adapt their conversation to their hearers, and, while they are personal or conventional with men, they are often logical enough with other women, and the element of truth that remains in the criticism may be accounted for by the influence of the arbitrary restrictions which the opponents of woman suffrage would perpetuate. If a man were proscribed by custom from the free exercise of his faculties, if his duties were limited to managing a household, engaging and discharging servants, ordering meals, and bearing and tending children, he would infallibly become tightly bound by narrow and conventional prejudices, and if he were able to gain any practical ends, only by appeals to the emotions rather than to the intelligence of women, and usually a single woman and that his wife, he would be unable to argue long impersonally, and would soon lose what freedom of thought and speech he once possessed. The intellectual peculiarities of women may be caused by the narrowness of the

sphere within which their interests are habitually restricted; it is then unscientific to suppose them to be inherent in the sex.

This conclusion is confirmed by the facts that similar peculiarities are characteristic of races and classes living in servile or menial conditions, that they are perceptible even in men anywhere of limited experience or dependent on others, and that they are not in the least characteristic of women who have had varied business or professional experience, who have been educated without reference to marriage, or who have been married to liberal-minded men. The typical New England school-teacher is neither illogical nor absurdly sentimental, and over eighty per cent. of New England school-teachers are women. The average married woman, even, in questions that she has studied, is not illogical; she is usually ingeniously economical, prudent in selecting servants, far-seeing in advice to her husband. With such qualities, women could not fail to exercise the suffrage in the main with intelligence.

Again, mental operations of the same kind are involved in all actions that require thought. Economy at home predisposes to public economy: practical common sense is as necessary in politics as in housekeeping, insight into character is as useful in choosing public as domestic servants. In Massachusetts, indeed, the intellectual inferiority of women to men cannot be seriously suggested or consistently maintained. The welfare of this Commonwealth is truly admitted to be based on the excellence of its public school system, and women who are held to be sufficiently intelligent to vote for members of school committees cannot be said to lack the intelligence requisite to vote wisely for the mayor of a city or for the selectmen of a town.

Instead of women being intellectually inferior to men, it would, probably, be more nearly true in this Commonwealth that the women are as a rule intellectually superior to the men of the same class in society. Such, at least, is the reason commonly assigned for the often noticed disinclination to marriage among the most carefully educated women; and among our laboring, farming, manufacturing and mercantile population it is the women rather than the men who have the

time and the inclination to attend lectures and concerts, to read, study, and discuss questions not purely personal and sordid, in a word, who strive the most zealously to maintain and broaden their intellectual life. So much is admitted even by many of the most vigorous opponents of woman suffrage. "The ballot," says the President of Oberlin College, "cannot be denied to woman on the ground that she has not the intelligence and discernment to use it well. Many women unquestionably have such intelligence, and there is scarcely room for doubt that women as a body would vote as wisely as men."[1]

If women are not disqualified for voting by the nature of their intelligence, it is no objection to giving them the suffrage that at the present time but few of them have studied political questions. So long as women are unable to vote they cannot be expected to inform themselves carefully about matters of politics, for the same reason that a person who cannot be a shoemaker is not expected to study the process of making shoes. It is a proof of common sense, rather than an indication of folly, to confine one's efforts to subjects in which one can do practical work. Few women studied law before they were granted admission to the bar, now many women have written law books; few women studied medicine before they were allowed to practice it, now excellent essays on medical subjects are written by women. If women have brains like those of men, they will inform themselves about political questions as rapidly and as correctly as men, so soon as those questions are presented to them. Such questions, indeed, as usually arise in municipal elections possess no special complexity, and after a few hours' talk, and by a little attention, can be solved by any normally constituted person.

Finally, it may be said that the objection to women's intelligence has been answered with far more completeness than was in any way necessary. "What is wanted in politics is the suffrage of the great mass of society, rather than that of exceptional genius, which can always make its influence felt, that this great mass may be able, by means of the suffrage, to make known its sufferings and its wants." From this point of view, a voter need not be qualified by considerable intelligence, but only by intelligence sufficient to understand

[1] James H. Fairchild, *Woman's Right to the Ballot.*

her individual wants and requirements and the probable effect of her vote, if successful, upon herself and her neighbors. In the case of city or town elections, very ordinary intelligence is sufficient for this purpose. Whether taxes should be increased or lessened, whether the sale of intoxicating liquors should be licensed or not, whether the roads have been neglected, whether the poor-house is managed economically, whether a new park is desirable, whether the conduct of local officers has been efficient or the reverse, whether the candidates are honest or dishonest, energetic or idle, able or incompetent, — these are questions that need seriously confuse only persons unusually unobservant or thick-headed, and that women in general far exceed this minimum of intelligence can surely be denied by no one who is qualified by the same standard.

Do a woman's moral qualities disqualify her from voting?

Few persons would venture to say that women are, as a rule, less moral than men, yet, surprisingly enough, certain objections have been raised to woman suffrage on the ground of morality.

Some writers have professed horror at the possibility of vicious women voting, and to avert such an evil would deny the suffrage to any woman. A perfect answer to such disingenuous cavilers was made by Colonel King-Harmon in the House of Commons in 1884, "Will one who makes that argument," he exclaimed, "exclude from the franchise those men who lead into vice, and retain in vice and degradation, these unfortunate women? . . . No; man may sin and be a power in the state, but when a woman sins, not only is she to have no power but her whole sisterhood is to be excluded from it." It is plain that, logically carried out, this argument would lead to the disfranchisement of all men as well as of all women.

It is true that, in the words of an able legal opponent of woman suffrage, "if municipal suffrage is extended to women, it must include all alike. Not the wise, the good, the pure only will vote, but, shoulder to shoulder with them, the ignorant, the bad, and the abandoned." This argument is forcible only so far as it appeals to conventional prejudice: but such prejudice is unreasonable. "The wise, the good, the pure only,"

have no special privilege of attending divine worship on Sunday, or of going shopping, and at church or store, in the horse-car or the street, they can never be sure but that "shoulder to shoulder with them," they may meet "the ignorant, the bad, and the abandoned." No greater danger than this is possible at the polls, — the casual contact of the streets, — and the suggestion that such casual contact is morally contagious or justifies restrictive measures is a libel on the women of Massachusetts, or else our civilization is a mistake and the street customs of Constantinople should be imported into Boston.

In a similar spirit of false sentimentality Mr. Francis Parkman has recently drawn a highly-colored picture of the "woman inside politics," as illustrated by representatives of the "lobby" at Washington: but the average male voter of to-day has nothing in common with the dishonest, lying, corrupt male "lobbyist;" why, then, should the average woman voter of to-morrow have anything in common with the dishonest, lying, flattering woman lobbyist? "None know better than women," sneers Mr. Parkman, "the potency of feminine charms aided by feminine arts;" but feminine charms and feminine arts are not supposed to be peculiarly effective with other women. So long as men alone have the suffrage, a woman can gain her ends only by indirect influence upon the vanity and susceptibility of men, but so soon as women have the franchise the necessity for such practices will cease. The "woman inside politics" to-day is, it may be confidently asserted, the creation of conditions that the passage of a woman suffrage bill would more than anything else tend to abolish forever.

As a question of public expediency, the fact that women are human, and therefore not all good, is no reason for not extending the franchise to women unless there are more abandoned women than there are abandoned men. The respective average morality of men and women in Massachusetts may be roughly determined from the statistics cited in the reports of the Prison Commissioners. Of the prisoners confined in the jails and prisons in this State from 1871 to 1885 inclusive, the percentage of women has varied from fifteen per cent. to twenty per cent. only; and for the year ending September 30, 1885, out of a total number of 62,607 arrested for all offenses,

only 8,236, or about nine per cent., were women. These statistics seem to be conclusive.

The moral quality, moreover, that is especially concerned with qualification for voting is admitted to be honesty in its broadest sense. It is the prevalence of bribery, of pecuniary corruption, in some one or other of its myriad, protean disguises, that vitiates the politics of our great cities; and honesty in money matters is peculiarly characteristic of women. The practice and admissions of merchants and shopkeepers generally testify to the special suitability of women for fiduciary positions, such as those of book-keepers and cashiers; and of women in the employment of the government, in the treasury and other departments, it is stated that not one has ever been found guilty of embezzlement. The introduction into politics of a class of voters free, in the main, from the grosser and more selfish vices, could not fail to have a most far-reaching and important influence for good.

So far from women being morally inferior to men, the reverse is the truth. It is women rather than men who are earnest in the pursuit of high ideals, who shrink from what is evil, who desire above everything what is right. Many opponents of woman suffrage are even willing to assert that women are too good for American politics, that their clean hands must not be soiled by such "dirty work," to quote an able legal opponent of woman suffrage, that they have, in the words of Mr. Francis Parkman, an "absurd sense of abstract right," absurd because impracticable. These assertions are very largely true, but they prove, not that women must be kept out of politics, but that the State can no longer dispense with their power "to make for righteousness" in politics. In times not very remote similar expressions were hurled by professional politicians at the "Independents."

It was well said by Mr. Lecky that "the change from the ideal of paganism to the ideal of Christianity was a change from a type which was essentially male to a type which was essentially female," and all scholars who have studied history in a scientific spirit confirm the belief of Mr. Fiske[1] that the future evolution of the human race must be chiefly moral. Women are the chief custodians of morality, children learn

[1] *The Destiny of Man.*

goodness from their mothers, men chiefly from the women they love or who love them. The great political questions of the future will tend more and more to become questions of political morality, and can be rightly determined only by the combined moral forces of a nation or of the race. The right ordering of the local administration of towns and cities has already come to depend largely on moral issues; and, even when the making of the laws is not a local question, the enforcement of the laws is a local question and a moral question.

One further objection must be referred to here, that women are so devout that their votes would be dictated by the priests and clergy. The undue influence of the Catholic Church is what is specially feared, and the fear is, probably, not wholly without foundation. But the influence of that powerful body is not always a menace to the state. In the cause of temperance and morality the parish priest is invariably on the side of order and decency. It is only in regard to our public school system that Catholic or sectarian influence is a serious danger; and, now that the elections of school committees have been thrown open to women, as yet without detriment to their efficiency, this objection can no longer be urged with honesty or consistency.

The conclusion is inevitable that the moral qualities of women are not such as to disqualify them for voting.

Since women are not disqualified by any qualities, physical, intellectual, or moral, that characterize them as women, it would seem that there is no reason in fact for maintaining any longer the anomalous custom that disfranchises them. Their qualities are, rather, such as make the voting of women a matter of public expediency. Are women physically weaker than men? Then they need direct representation in the government more than do men. Are they apt to be more nervous than men? Then they need the healthy distraction of wider and less personal interests. Are they as intelligent as men with a logic different from men's logic but no less cogent? Then the state needs the help of their wisdom as well as men's. Are they moral as men are not moral, virtuous where men are brave, sympathetic where men are

just, honest where men are politic? Then, in the moral evolution of the future, in the advance towards a more equitable and humanitarian democracy, the moral qualities of women are needed to supplement those of men in order to attain the best government attainable by human beings. In the present age of civilization a commonwealth can no longer afford to be deprived of the active coöperation of its women.

In the face of such facts, the opposition of intelligent men to woman suffrage can be explained only as due to a survival of the selfish instincts of primitive times which led men to regard woman as subservient wholly to their own personal gratification, and to seclude for their own delight and comfort qualities intended for the improvement and regeneration of mankind. To sentiments not less selfish, though more refined, must likewise be attributed the reluctance of many intelligent women to offer to perform, and to insist upon performing, the duties they owe to the political society in which they live; for a desire to please a husband, a father, or a brother, rather than to serve the state, to aid the right, and to fight crime, disorder, misery, and injustice, cannot be called unselfish.

All possible objections that are directly relevant and that are based upon matters of fact have now been answered. The only possible objections that remain to be considered must, then, be more or less irrelevant and based on theory or prejudice. Such objections are difficult to classify. Some relate to obsolete theories of the constitution of the universe, as that men and women have preappointed "spheres of action," and that politics are outside of women's sphere: others to obsolete theories of government, as that the political unit is the family not the individual, and therefore women are represented, or that only classes of individuals are to be represented and that women are not a class: and others, again, to crude notions of practical convenience and of sentimentality, as that women are disinclined to vote and that this disinclination would make woman suffrage inoperative for the public good; or that woman suffrage will disturb the domestic happiness of married people; or that women now possess an influence over men amply sufficient to secure all proper legislation they may require, and that their influence will be lessened, rather than increased, by woman suffrage.

All these objections are alike in being absolutely theoretical, and may be roughly classified as the natural sphere theory, the patriarchal theory, the social theory, and the sentimental theory.

The Natural Sphere Theory. It is not possible in the case of any individual, much less in the case of a number of individuals, to define *a priori* the limits within which his or their faculties can be exercised to the best advantage. The notion that such definition is possible is a survival of the habits of thought that prevailed in prescientific ages. The theory was once common that trade was outside the sphere of a gentleman, and that politics was outside the sphere of a laborer. It is a survival of the customs of "caste." Scientifically speaking, there are no such natural limitations as "spheres."

If there is a "proper sphere" for a woman, as a woman, established by the constitution of the universe, it must be ascertainable, and it must be invariable. No such sphere, however, can be ascertained. "We are told," says Herbert Spencer, "that 'woman's mission' is a domestic one, that her character and position do not admit of her taking part in the decision of public questions — that politics are beyond her sphere. But this raises the question, who shall say what her sphere is? . . . As the usages of mankind vary so much, let us hear how it is to be shown that the sphere we assign her is the true one — that the limits we have set to female activity are just the proper limits. Let us hear why on this point of our social polity we are exactly right, whilst we are wrong on so many others. We must conclude that, being required by that first prerequisite to greatest happiness, the law of equal freedom, such a concession" (as that of woman suffrage) "is unquestionably right and good."

For one individual, or for any number of individuals, to assign arbitrary, definite limits to the activity of another or of others, is an act of bigotry and injustice obviously indefensible on scientific principles.

The so-called "proper sphere" of women has, moreover, been perpetually changing. In the time of Jane Austen it was thought improper for women to write novels, twenty years ago it was thought improper for women to study medicine and anatomy, and even to-day there are many people who think it

improper for woman to lecture. The question of "woman's sphere" has, in fact, been always a question not of reason but of prejudice, — a question of social propriety, that has been answered differently with every change of custom or condition. That "sphere" has always been thought "proper" for women which changing social conditions have made necessary or convenient. From this point of view it may be unhesitatingly asserted, that so soon as it is seen that the best interests of the government require the coöperation of women, politics will be felt to be within, and not outside of, the natural sphere of women.

Natural social laws there unquestionably are, and in one sense it may be said that the "sphere" of each person is predetermined by Nature. Military service is not within the sphere of a cripple, since military service requires more than a cripple's activity. For a like reason military service is not within the sphere of a woman. These illustrations suggest the only scientific meaning of the phrase, "a person's natural sphere." All that any person can do well is within his natural sphere, and only what a person cannot do well is outside of his proper sphere. If a woman is devoid of intelligence we may say that politics is not within her sphere, but in no other sense than we might say of a blind woman that painting is not her natural vocation.

The word "sphere" is, then, equivalent to the word "vocation" or "profession," and in its widest signification is equivalent to "power," — and it would be as unreasonable to determine the vocation suited to a particular man's talents and character from *a priori* notions of what is manly as it is to determine the "sphere of action" suited to a particular woman's talents and character from *a priori* notions of what is womanly. "The proper sphere of all human beings," in the words of Mr. Mill, "is the largest and highest which they are able to attain to," and "what this is cannot be ascertained without complete liberty of choice."

Some good people speak as if woman suffrage would in some mysterious manner operate to repeal the laws of Nature. It is forgotten by these pious alarmists that the only effect of a bill granting women the suffrage would be to remove a restriction which hinders the free operation of the

laws of Nature. We would abolish a custom which limits the natural development and activity of human beings, a custom which arbitrarily deprives the government of the services of one half of the citizens, as intelligent, as moral, and as vitally concerned in the public welfare as any.

Of one thing we may be absolutely certain, that "what is contrary to woman's nature to do, they will never be made to do by simply giving their nature free play." [1] If women generally are unable from ill-health, domestic business, or disinclination, to vote, they will not vote; if women generally are unsuited for public office, women will seldom be elected to public offices; if the operation of a municipal woman suffrage act is not beneficial, the act after fair trial will unquestionably be repealed and will not be reënacted until the particulars of its failure have been forgotten. So much at least may be expected from the common sense of our people.

One further remark needs making in this connection. The advocates of woman suffrage are not endeavoring to introduce into the quiet lives of women considerations and perplexities with which they have no concern; they are simply pleading for license for women to share in the discussion and decision of matters and questions with which their personal interests are inextricably involved. As wives and mothers, as owners of property, as employers and employees, as members of professions, as educated citizens, — women are, in spite of themselves, personally concerned in the making and enforcing of all laws that relate to the welfare of their husbands or their children, the security and distribution or inheritance of property, the regulation of labor, or the protection of person or reputation. The social and legal changes of the last fifty years have already introduced politics into the sphere of women, and the grant of woman suffrage simply recognizes and logically accepts existing facts.

The Patriarchal Theory was stated with some vigor in this Commonwealth in the Constitutional Convention of 1853, but it can be entertained by no student of history. The individual, legally competent, male citizen is the political unit of the American State, or else bachelors and young men over twenty-one living in their fathers' households would be dis-

[1] J. S. Mill.

franchised. "We might as well say," suggested Mrs. Stanton, "that the family is a religious unit, as assert that it is a political unit, and claim that the head must do the family repenting, praying, and confessing, and represent the family in the courts of heaven as well as at the polling booth."

If, however, from some esoteric point of view, the family were regarded as the political unit, — since all the male members duly qualified, and not the head only, of a family are allowed to vote, all women similarly qualified should be allowed to vote.

The theory rests really on obsolete social and legal conditions which sank the individuality of a married woman in that of her husband, and the individuality of an unmarried daughter in that of her father. Those conditions are abolished, and the theory which justified them is discredited. It survives now only in a purely ornamental form as in the imaginary Eden sketched in "Common Sense as to Woman Franchise," where "husbands and wives benignly sit together under their own vines and figtrees, with children around them whom they are training for the state and for heaven — all with trustful affection looking toward the husband and father as their strong one to act, and their wise one to vote, for the household."

Again it is said that government is a difficult business, and that those alone should vote who are versed in affairs as women are not yet. The argument is specious, but proves too much, for it would substitute an oligarchy for our democracy. It requires business qualities of a high order to be a good mayor of a large city, but it fortunately does not require the same qualities to discern one and reëlect him. The supposed intricacy of politics has often caused grave evils to the state by keeping at home honest but simple minded citizens; it was their inaction that gave the Tweed Ring to New York: and the action of our women may help us to remove or avert evils no less scandalous.

Equally futile is the suggestion that women ought not to vote because they are not "a separate class." The argument would disenfranchise all our citizens, for there are no political classes among citizens in America. "The only meaning of the expression, 'a separate class,' is a number of people for

whom different rules and regulations are required from their neighbors." The slaves were a separate class before they were enfranchised, but they are a separate class no longer. Among men there are no political classes, since all male citizens have equal political privileges and opportunities. In the only meaning of the phrase, women may be said to form a political class, since they have not the same political privileges and opportunities that men have, and not until all citizens, irrespective of sex, are equally enfranchised, will women cease to constitute a political class. The tendency of the ages and the requirements of good government tend to abolish all class distinctions, and it is as individuals, rather than as a class, that women claim the right to vote.

The objection reduces itself readily to the absurdity, that women should not be enfranchised since they are not a political class, though there is no other political class: and as an argument, it leads irresistibly to the dilemma that if women are a separate class they cannot be wisely represented by a different class, and that if women are not a separate class, they ought not to be disqualified from voting as a class, but only as individuals.

The objections based on *social theories* relate mostly to practical difficulties in the working of woman suffrage, and until woman suffrage is actually an accomplished fact, such questions are purely speculative and unsusceptible of absolute proof or disproof. Questions of practical detail may generally be left to settle themselves. The mutual convenience of the parties interested will determine them in each case as they arise: and in the absence of experience no valid objection to a measure can be based on such fancied difficulties. The persistent emphasis with which they are reiterated by the opponents of woman suffrage is, indeed, not the least significant proof of the weakness of their cause.

Women, it is said, will be, for the most part, unwilling to vote; only the least intelligent and the most vicious will go to the polls; therefore woman suffrage is certain to be a public calamity.

In this State, the failure of any considerable number of women to vote for members of school committees, the absence of any general demand by women for the suffrage, and

the vigorous opposition of many well known and influential women, — these facts are quoted to prove that women, even the best women, will not exercise the right of suffrage when they have it. Such a conclusion is, however, incorrect.

The election of a school committee is of less than ordinary political interest to the average citizen; it involves, as a rule, no question of public interest or personal convenience, and, in many cases, one candidate is as likely as another to discharge suitably the limited duties of the office. If members of school committees were voted for on a day other than the regular election day, it may be doubted whether any considerable number of men would put themselves to any inconvenience to attend that particular election. The votes on the constitutional amendments last submitted to the people of this State present a striking analogy to this case. In 1881, less than one third, and in 1885, less than one fourth, of those who voted for governor cared to vote on the constitutional amendment. It would be as logical to conclude from these statistics that the men of Massachusetts are not sufficiently interested in the Constitution to vote with enthusiasm on any amendment to it, as to conclude from the other statistics that the women of Massachusetts are not sufficiently interested in politics to vote with enthusiasm on any political question. The only logical conclusion from such facts is that the amendments submitted in 1881 and 1885 seemed to the men, and the elections of school committees seem to the women, of no special importance.

There are further reasons which sufficiently account for the small number of women voting in school-committee elections. Women have to seek out an assessor and ask to be assessed for a poll tax, while men are assessed as of course. This distinction operates practically as a check to the qualification of women. In addition to this distinction between men and women voters, until last year women, desiring to vote, were required to return lists of their property yearly to the assessors, and the names of women, once registered, were not retained, as are the names of men, from year to year on the registry of voters.

The absence of any general demand among women for the suffrage is not a serious objection. Those who have never thoroughly considered and discussed the question cannot be

counted against it, and on this question so many men are prejudiced that the women under their control are not free to express their wishes. Few persons, and women least of all, are courageous enough to incur certain and immediate inconvenience and annoyance for the sake of a contingent and distant benefit. The slaves would never have been emancipated if Congress had refused to act till generally petitioned for emancipation, and if woman suffrage is to be granted only on such terms it may be long deferred for the same reason. Lack of information, hopelessness, conventionality, and undue influence, and not serious distaste for politics or want of interest, are the real reasons for the absence of a manifest general demand for woman suffrage.

That women should be found to remonstrate against woman suffrage is not surprising nor significant. Tradition, custom, and fashion are powerful motives, and yet of the signers of anti-suffrage petitions, doubtless, the great majority would be patriotic enough to vote if they were entitled to vote.

What evidence there is shows not that women will not vote, but that they will vote when the opportunity is given them. Such is the case in England. "In sixty-six municipal elections," said a writer in the "London Examiner" in 1879, "out of every thousand women who enjoy equal rights with men on the register, five hundred and sixteen went to the polls, which is but forty-eight less than the proportionate number of men." The same is true in Washington Territory, according to Chief Justice Greene, who said in 1885, "I should say that five sixths of those who were qualified voted at our last general election," and at the first election there, at which women voted, ballots were cast by some twelve thousand women. The activity, energy, and public spirit of the women of Massachusetts give every reason to believe that they will not neglect what they must feel to be their duty under woman suffrage. It is at least safe to predict that the vast majority of honest, intelligent, and good women will not leave the suffrage in the hands of the small minority of dishonest, foolish, and corrupt women. For the same women who to-day, under so many disadvantages, labor so efficiently in the cause of law and order will certainly not relax their efforts, or exert less influence for good, when they become a political force as well as a social power. In Wyoming Territory, according to the Hon. N. L. Andrews, Speaker of the House of the Territorial

Legislature, "there are times when the women do not all vote, . . . but when any particular scheme is put on foot by an individual or a party which does not commend itself to them as of good moral inception and uprightness, or when nominations are made which do not commend themselves to their moral sentiments, then, and at such times, you will see the women all vote and vote as they please without fear or favor." In Toronto "many women have the right to vote in municipal elections, and they cast their ballots in a mass for law and order." [1] Human nature, and woman's nature, is not so different in Massachusetts from human nature and woman's nature in England, Canada, and the Western Territories as to justify the charge that only bad or foolish women would vote in Massachusetts if women had the suffrage.

The negroes of the South were granted the suffrage not because they wished to vote, but because in the long run their voting would be for the best interests of the country and of themselves. The last Reform Bill in England was passed not because there was any popular clamor for it, for there was none, but from motives of public policy. That is the final test of the propriety of suffrage and not any question of personal liking or distaste.

Enough has been said, perhaps, to show that the objection that women are averse to woman suffrage is, in the words of Wendell Phillips, "partly false and wholly irrelevant." Yet this is the chief argument of the anti-suffragists. "Men will give women the suffrage if they want it," says Mr. Parkman; "the shortest and most decisive argument against municipal woman suffrage," says Mr. Fay, "is that nine women out of ten do not want it. When they do, they can have it for the asking." It is a conclusion worthy of the typical woman of the anti-suffragists to submit the question of the propriety of woman suffrage to be decided by the personal wishes of women who are assumed to be incompetent to vote. The suffrage, obviously, ought not to be granted to any one who wants it for that reason only. If it is for the interest of good government that no citizen of average intelligence should be debarred from sharing in the control of the government, and in the responsibility for it, the suffrage

[1] Rev. Joseph Cook, in Tremont Temple, February 14, 1887.

should be granted to women, whether they agitate for it or not, whether they think they would like it or not. "The law generally does not deprive a man of a privilege merely because he does n't want it; if a man prefers to avoid political life, he may do so, but the law generally does not compel people to follow their inclinations; and that women will not vote if they have the suffrage, certainly cannot be known to be true till the experiment is actually tried, while the dread of losing men's regard, and the hopelessness of success, make any statistics unreliable."

By making the whole question turn on the wishes of women, all the objections to woman suffrage on principle, or on the ground of incompetency, are waived, or are reduced to the single objection that women are indifferent to it, and the irrelevance of that argument is now sufficiently obvious.

There are other difficulties often supposed to be insuperable, matters of fancied domestic inconvenience.

"If women vote as they see fit," says Mr. Parkman, "without regarding their husbands, then unhappy marriages will be multiplied and divorces redoubled." This extraordinary assertion is capped by Mr. Fay, who argues that "under a new system which would allow and even compel women to mix with men at the caucus, in the town meetings, and at the polls, a difference of sentiment between the members of a household upon some political question or candidate would prove as potent a factor in destroying the happiness of that household as the entrance of the fiend intemperance itself."

Such sentiments are more worthy of a Turkish bashaw than of an American gentleman, and hardly deserve serious comment. Differences of opinion will always exist among educated and intelligent human beings. Unanimity of opinion between husband and wife can be secured to the unalloyed satisfaction of the husband only by his wife blindly accepting his opinions on all subjects as her own. The American system of education has made the old fashioned duty of wifely obedience and intellectual slavery impossible and absurd. But if men are not distressed by their wives' thinking and feeling on many matters differently from themselves, they cannot, unless they are tyrants, object to their voting differently from themselves. If men are pained by

their wives' holding opinions of their own, "the little rift within the lute" already exists and cannot be seriously widened by the wives having the power to give effect to their opinions by putting a piece of paper in a box. There is no more reason, from this point of view, for preventing women from voting as they please, than for preventing them from going to the church they prefer. Differences of religious opinion are, indeed, more apt to cause misery between friends than even differences of political opinion.

But what kind of political questions excites the greatest feeling, questions of municipal order, or questions of national policy? Surely the latter; and it is exactly such questions which excite the attention of even people who do not vote. During the civil war women on each side were as intensely interested as if they had each a thousand votes. In Ireland, to-day, every woman is an active partisan. If for a woman to entertain political opinions is an evil in the household, that evil already exists, and could not be increased by allowing women to take a part, usually silent, in those minor political questions that excite a proportionally slight degree of feeling.

The whole trouble consists in the fact that men too often choose for wives women whose intellectual personality they either do not respect or do not know. If, by granting women the suffrage, an additional reason is created for the marriage only of persons who have for each other's intelligence both consideration and respect, the change will be of the greatest service to society, and Mr. Parkman's phrase may be reversed so as to read, "unhappy marriages will be diminished and divorces reduced by half."

Another domestic difficulty has been recently propounded with affecting seriousness by a lady of consideration. What will become of the children, who will take care of the baby, and cook the dinner, when mother and nurse and cook are at town meeting? This conundrum, like so many other pleasant jests, may be best answered by asking another, What becomes of the children when the mother and nurse are at church? However exciting a political contest may be, it is certain, whatever else is neglected, babies and dinners will not be forgotten. Men find means to do all the business that needs doing on election day, and a little management

and mutual concessions will similarly meet all the necessities of this case. Women, fortunately, are not the fools that some anti-suffragists paint them, and the same considerations apply to all objections of this class.

The *Sentimental Theory, the Objection of Chivalry,* remains to be discussed. Women, it is said, have by virtue of their sex a great and controlling influence over men, and no man, even in political matters, will disregard the wishes and the welfare of his wife, his mother, his sister, or the woman he loves. In this way, it is true that women are in a very real sense represented, but in the present condition of society such indirect influence is neither safe nor right.

"You cannot abolish wives, nor sisters, nor mothers," said Wendell Phillips, "hence you cannot destroy woman's influence. In self-defense, therefore, add open responsibility where there exists unobserved and irresponsible power." In ancient times slaves often exercised the greatest political influence. In Turkey and Persia eunuchs and barbers have sometimes determined the decision of the most important public questions, — but power without responsibility is of doubtful benefit to either the individual or the state.

Such, certainly, is the theory of government in this country. If women have influence in politics, it can only be because they have opinions on political questions, and the American policy is to obtain the most direct and unbiased expression of individual opinion. The ballot is the only method yet found for securing the effective and just expression of such opinions; and to deny the ballot to women must inevitably result in perpetuating a method of enforcing opinions that has long since been proved to be inefficient and undesirable.

The present system is undesirable, since, while it cannot prevent women from having political influence, it tends to prevent that influence from being intelligently and wisely exercised. A woman "is taught that she has no business with things out of the family; accordingly she seldom has any honest and conscientious opinion on them; and therefore hardly ever meddles with them for any legitimate purpose, but generally for an interested one." Such a statement, though made by a woman-suffragist, is probably extravagant, but it emphasizes an important truth. Of women, no less

than of men, it is true that political dependence fosters ignorance and cowardice, and that independence of thought and inquiry is fostered only by political independence. It is a legitimate deduction from the history of slaves, of serfs, and of all dependent people, to conclude that it is the absence of the suffrage that keeps so many women to such a degree "ill-educated, bullied, cowardly, bigoted, and empty-headed."

It is an idle fear that women may lose some feminine charms if they are allowed the suffrage, that there is danger of women becoming less modest, too much like men. The same fears were expressed of the result of the higher education of women, and of the opening of the professions to women. "Educate women like men," said Rousseau, "and the more they resemble our sex the less power will they have over us;" but to all such arguments Mrs. Godwin's reply to Rousseau is a perfect answer. "This is the very point I aim at. I do not wish them to have power over men but over themselves." The mere influence of sex is not so often an appeal to the higher reason, to the calm intelligence, as to make it expedient to debar women from exercising any other influence in politics. The sexual instinct is not so feeble as to need to be stimulated by making all the qualities of women peculiar. The permanent elements of human nature are such that there need not be the faintest fear that women will ever lack lovers, or that, according to the ill-advised suggestion of Dr. Moore, "Bacon, for want of a mother, will not be born." Women, rather, will become more satisfactory friends and helpmates of men, when they have learned self-reliance by depending on themselves, self-protection by protecting themselves, self-reverence and self-control and the courage of their convictions by freely and openly sharing, on equal terms with men, in the responsibilities of the government.

And is the corruption in American politics so gross and unconcealed that women must surely be contaminated by taking part in a town or city election? There is nothing vile in the nature of an election; and anything not evil in itself can be done without stain by the pure, and by the patriot without corruption. To the ordinary voter the polling places present no obvious scenes of iniquity; and if any there were, they would soon vanish at the presence of women. It is easy to

sneer at the "purifying influence of women in politics," as politicians sneer at independent voters as "too good for politics;" but such sneers are like hypocrisy, a tribute that vice pays to virtue, and women who, as they became educated, civilized society, will, as they become enfranchised, civilize politics.

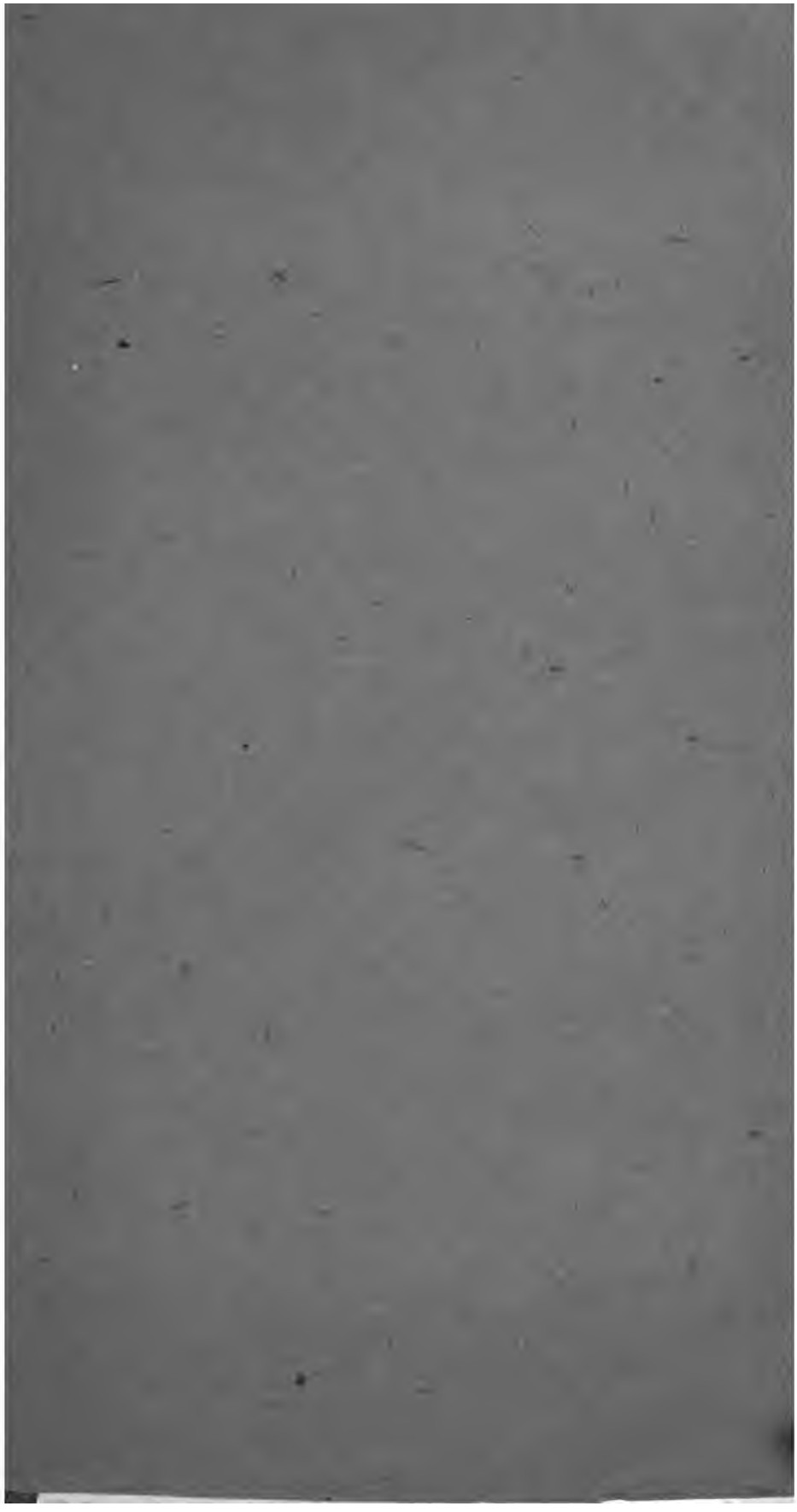
"The good works," it has been said, "which the legislature has done for women have been not on account of, but in spite of, the agitation for municipal woman suffrage." There is an innuendo here which it is not pleasant to contemplate. But admitting that for some reason or other the legislature has performed many "good works for women," it does not follow that the present system of indirect representation has been a success. Can it be said that it was not till 1874 that married women in Massachusetts could safely be allowed to lease and convey property and make contracts as if they were unmarried? that not till 1874 it was right to prohibit a husband who had deserted his wife, or failed to support her, or from whom she was living apart for justifiable cause, from imposing any restraint on her personal liberty? In like manner, not till 1877 were mothers authorized to appoint by will guardians for their minor children; not till 1884 could a married woman, deserted by her husband, dispose of her property freely by will; not till 1886 was the age of consent for girls raised to the age of eighteen years.

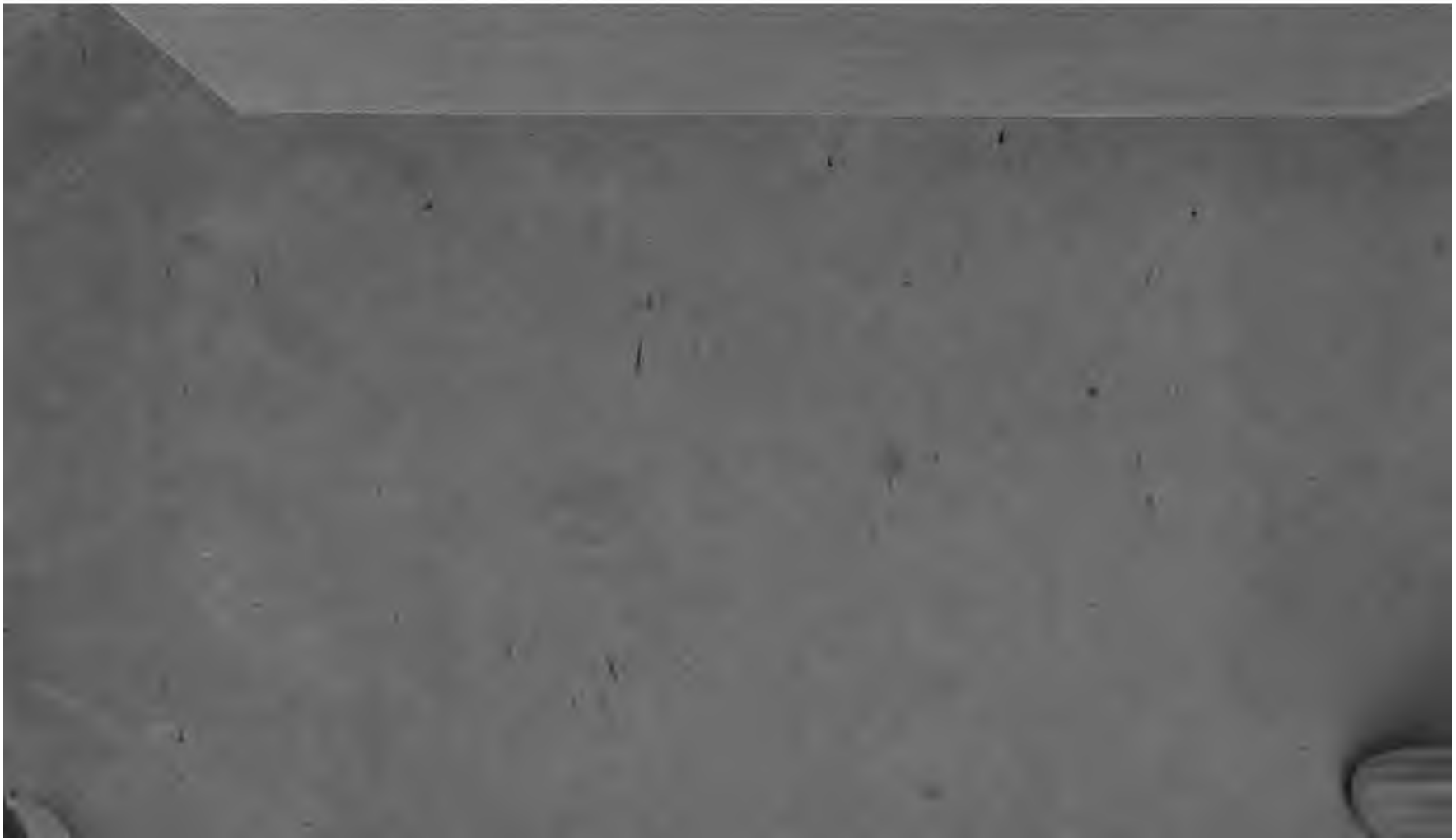
The injustice to women rectified by such legislation had in each case existed from the year one of the Republic. The "good works" spoken of by the anti-suffragists are somewhat tardy in their coming; and the delay may have been in part due to some mispresentation of the women whom they benefited.

Such, too, seems to be the only reason that accounts satisfactorily for the numerous civil inequalities in the laws of Massachusetts that still operate to the disadvantage of women. Is it just that a widow is entitled to only one third for life of her husband's lands, while a widower is entitled for life to the whole of the lands of his deceased wife? Is it just that, speaking generally, a married woman can, by will, dispose of only one half her personal property without the written consent of her husband, while a married man can dispose of the

whole of his personal property as he likes, unless his widow chooses to break the will and claim one third? Is it just that the father only is entitled to the wages of his minor children? These are but a few instances of the discrimination against women that pervades our laws, but they suffice to illustrate vividly the truth of the saying, that "the only means men have devised for getting what they want is the ballot."

All possible objections to woman suffrage, whether alleged deductions from fact or ingenious creations of fancy, I have now attempted to consider with perhaps unnecessary prolixity. History, as well as philosophy, proves the public benefit of the widest possible extension of the law of equal freedom. The conclusion of the whole matter may well be that woman suffrage in all political elections is at this time and in this Commonwealth essential to the best government. It was not, however, necessary to prove so much, in order to show the wisdom of enacting a municipal woman suffrage law. It is sufficient if this essay has established that there is a reasonable doubt whether it may not be for the general welfare for some women to vote on some political questions or for some political officers. If such a doubt is excited in the mind of the reader, it should logically involve the conclusion, suggested at the beginning of the essay, that the propriety of such modified woman suffrage, its limits and extent, should be submitted to some practical test, and that such a test can be made in the most simple, safe, and conservative manner by the enactment of a Municipal Woman Suffrage Bill; for the act if successful in operation, will not need to be supplemented immediately by any further legislation, and, if unsuccessful, it can be repealed without delay, without difficulty, and without confusion.





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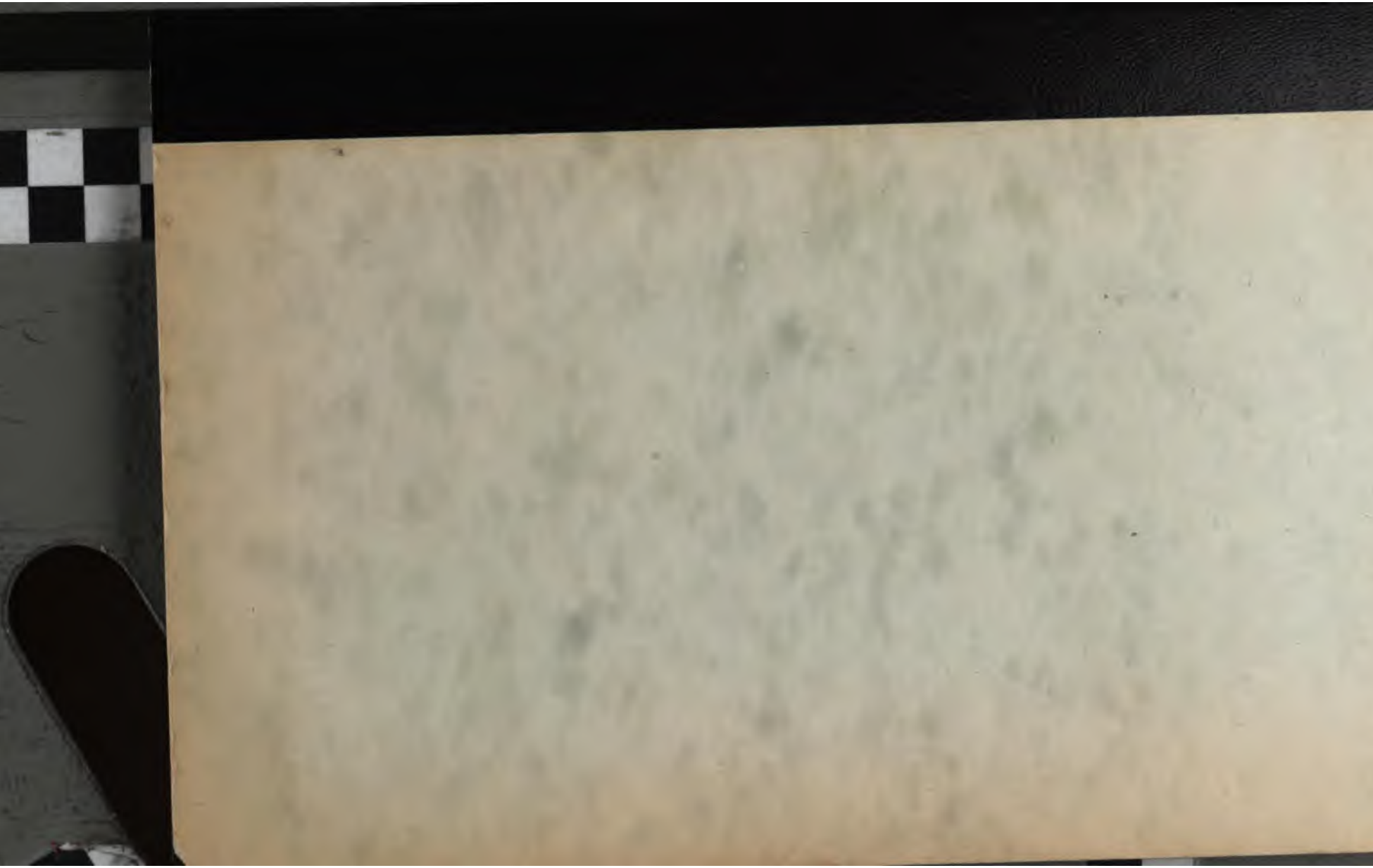
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